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SEA-BLUE AND BLOOD-RED

(Polyphonic Prose)

BY AMY LOWELL

THE MEDITERRANEAN

Blue as the tip of a salvia blossom, the inverted cup of the sky arches over the sea. Up to meet it, in a flat band of glaring colour, rises the water. The sky is unspecked by clouds, but the sea is flecked with pink and white light shadows, and silver scintillations snip-snap over the tops of the waves.

Something moves along the horizon. A puff of wind blowing up the edges of the silver-blue sky? Clouds! Clouds! Great thunderheads marching along the skyline! No, by Jove! The sun shining on sails! Vessels, hull down, with only their tiers of canvas showing. Beautiful ballooning thunderheads dipping one after another below the blue band of the sea.

NAPLES

Red tiles, yellow stucco, layer on layer of windows, roofs, and balconies, Naples pushes up the hill away from the curving bay. A red, half-closed eye, Vesuvius watches and waits. All Naples prates of this and that, and runs about its little business, shouting, bawling, incessantly calling its wares. Fish frying, macaroni drying, seven feet piles of red and white brocoli, grapes heaped high with rosemary, sliced pomegranates dripping seeds, plucked and bleeding chickens, figs on spits, lemons in baskets, melons cut and quartered nicely: "*Ah, che bella cosa!*" They even sell water, clear crystal water for a *paul* or two. And everything done to a hullabaloo. They jabber over cheese, they chatter over wine, they gabble at the corners in the bright sunshine. And

piercing through the noise is the beggar-whine, always, like an undertone, the beggar-whine; and always the crimson, watching eye of Vesuvius.

Have you seen her—the Ambassador? Ah, *Bellissima Creatura! Una Donna Rara!* She is fairer than the Blessed Virgin; and good! Never was such a soul in such a body! The rôle of her benefactions would stretch from here to Posillipo. And she loves the people, loves to go among them and speak to this one and that, and her apple-blossom face under the big blue hat works miracles like the Holy Images in the Churches.

In her great house with the red marble stairway, Lady Hamilton holds brilliant sway. From her boudoir windows she can see the bay, and on the left, hanging there, a flame in a cresset, the blood-red glare of Vesuvius staring at the clear blue air.

Blood-red on a night of stars, red like a wound, with lava scars. In the round wall-mirrors of her boudoir, is the blackness of the bay, the whiteness of a star, and the bleeding redness of the mountain's core. Nothing more. All night long, in the mirrors, nothing more. Black water, red stain, and above, a star with its silver rain.

Over the people, over the king, trip the little Ambassadorial feet; fleet and light as a pigeon's wing, they brush over the artists, the friars, the *abbés*, the Court. They bear her higher and higher at each step. Up and over the hearts of Naples goes the beautiful Lady Hamilton, till she reaches even to the Queen; then rests in a sheening, shimmering altitude, between earth and sky, high and floating as the red crater of Vesuvius. Buoyed up and sustained in a blood-red destiny, all on fire for the world to see.

Proud Lady Hamilton! Superb Lady Hamilton! Quivering, blood-swept, vivid Lady Hamilton! Your vigour is enough to awake the dead, as you tread the newly uncovered courtyards of Pompeii. There is a murmur all over the opera-house when you enter your box. And your frocks! Jesu! What frocks! "India painting on wyte sattin!" And a new camlet shawl, all sea-blue and blood-red, in an intricate pattern, given by Sir William to help you do your marvelous "Attitudes." Incomparable actress! No thea-

tre built is big enough to compass you. It takes a world; and centuries shall elbow each other aside to watch you act your part. Art, Emma, or heart?

The blood-red cone of Vesuvius glows in the night.

She sings *Luce Bella*, and Naples cries "*Brava! Ancora!*" and claps its hands. She dances the tarantella, and poses before a screen with the red-blue shawl. It is the frescoes of Pompeii unfrozen; it is the fine-cut profiles of Sicilian coins; it is Apollo Belvedere himself—Goethe has said it. She wears a Turkish dress, and her face is sweet and lively as rippled water.

The lava-streams of Vesuvius descend as far as Portici. She climbs the peak of fire at midnight—five miles of flame. A blood-red mountain, seeping tears of blood. She skips over glowing ashes and laughs at the pale, faded moon, wan in the light of the red-hot lava. What a night! Spires and sparks of livid flame shooting into the black sky. Blood-red smears of fire; blood-red gashes, flashing her out against the smouldering mountain. A tossing fountain of blood-red jets, it sets her hair flicking into the air like licking flamelets of a burning aureole. Blood-red is everywhere. She wears it as a halo and diadem. Emma, Emma Hamilton, Ambassadors of Great Britain to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

ABOUKIR BAY, EGYPT

North-north-west, and a whole-sail breeze, ruffling up the larkspur-blue sea, breaking the tops of the waves into egg-white foam, shoving ripple after ripple of pale jade-green over the shoals of Aboukir Bay. Away to the East rolls in the sluggish water of old Nile. West and South—hot, yellow land. Ships at anchor. Thirteen ships flying the *tricolore*, and riding at ease in a patch of blue water inside a jade-green hem. What of them? Ah, fine ships! The *Orient*, one hundred and twenty guns, *Franklin*, *Tonnant*, each with eighty. Weighty metal to float on a patch of blue with a green hem. They ride stem to stern, in a long line, pointing the way to Aboukir Bay.

To the North are thunderheads, ballooning, silver-white thunderheads rising up out of the horizon. The thunderheads draw steadily up into the blue-blossomed sky. A topgallant breeze pushes them rapidly over the white-specked

water. One, Two, Six, Ten, Thirteen separate tiered clouds, and the wind sings loud in their shrouds and spars. The royals are furled, but the topgallantsails and topsails are full and straining. Thirteen white thunderheads bearing down on Aboukir Bay.

The Admiral is working the stump of his right arm; do not cross his hawse, I advise you.

“Youngster to the mast-head. What! Going without your glass, and be damned to you! Let me know what you see, immediately.”

“The enemy fleet, Sir, at anchor in the bay.”

“Bend on the signal to form in line of battle, Sir Ed’ard.”

The bright wind straightens the signal pennants until they stand out rigid like boards.

“Captain Hood reports eleven fathoms, Sir, and shall he bear up and sound?”

“Signal Captain Hood to lead, sounding.”

“By the mark ten! A quarter less nine! By the deep eight!”

Round to starboard swing the white thunderheads, the water of their bows washing over the green jade hem. An orange sunset steams in the shrouds, and glints upon the muzzles of the cannon in the open ports. The hammocks are down; the guns run out and primed; beside each is a pile of canister and grape; gunners are blowing on their matches; snatches of fife music drift down to the lower decks. In the cockpits, the surgeons are feeling the edges of knives and saws; men think of their wives and swear softly, spitting on their hands.

“Let go that anchor! By God, she hangs!”

Past the *Guerrier* slides the *Goliath*, but the anchor drops and stops her on the inner quarter of the *Conquérant*. The *Zealous* brings up on the bow of the *Guerrier*, the *Orion*, *Theseus*, *Audacious*, are all come to, inside the French ships.

The *Vanguard*, Admiral’s pennant flying, is lying outside the *Spartiate*, distant only a pistol shot.

In a pattern like a country dance, each balanced justly by its neighbour, lightly, with no apparent labour, the ships

slip into place, and lace a design of white sails and yellow yards on the purple, flowing water. Almighty Providence, what a day! Twenty-three ships in one small bay, and away to the eastward, the water of old Nile rolling sluggishly between its sandbars.

Seven hundred and forty guns open fire on the French fleet. The sun sinks into the purple-red water, its low, straight light playing gold on the slaughter. Yellow fire, shot with red, in wheat sheafs from the guns; and a racket and ripping which jerks the nerves, then stuns, until another broadside crashes the ears alive again. The men shine with soot and sweat, and slip in the blood which wets the deck.

The surgeons cut and cut, but men die steadily. It is heady work, this firing into ships not fifty feet distant. Lilac and grey, the heaving bay, slapped and torn by thousands of splashings of shot and spars. Great red stars peer through the smoke, a mast is broke short off at the lashings and falls overboard, with the rising moon flashing in its top-hamper.

There is a rattle of musketry; pipe-clayed, red-coated marines swab, and fire, and swab. A round shot finishes the job, and tears its way out through splintering bulwarks. The roar of broadside after broadside echoes from the shore in a long, hoarse humming. Drums beat in little fire-cracker snappings, and a boatswain's whistle wires, thin and sharp, through the din, and breaks short off against the scream of a gun crew, cut to bits by a bursting cannon.

Three times they clear the *Vanguard's* guns of a muck of corpses, but each new crew comes on with a cheer and each discharge is a jeer of derision.

The Admiral is hit. A flying sliver of iron has shivered his head and opened it, the skin lies quivering over his one good eye. He sees red, blood-red, and the roar of the guns sounds like water running over stones. He has to be led below.

Eight bells, and the poop of the *Orient* is on fire. "Higher, men, train your guns a little higher. Don't give them a loophole to scotch the flame. 'Tis their new fine paint they'll have to blame." Yellow and red, waving tigerlilies, the flames shoot up—round serrated petals, flung out of the

black-and-silver cup of the bay. Each stay is wound with a flickering fringe. The ropes curl up and shrivel as though a twinge of pain withered them. Spasm after spasm convulses the ship. A Clap!—A Crash!—A Boom!—and silence. The ships have ceased firing.

Ten, twenty, forty seconds: . . .

Then a dash of water as masts and spars fall from an immense height, and in the room of the floating, licking tiger-lily is a chasm of yellow and red whirling eddies. The guns start firing again.

Foot after foot across the sky goes the moon, with her train of swirling silver-blue stars.

The day is fair. In the clear Egyptian air, the water of Aboukir Bay is as blue as the bottom flowers of a larkspur spray. The shoals are green with a white metal sheen, and between its sandbars the Nile can be seen, slowly rolling out to sea.

The Admiral's head is bound up, and his eye is blood-shot and very red, but he is sitting at his desk writing, for all that. Through the stern windows is the blue of the sea, and reflections dance waveringly on his paper. This is what he has written:

VANGUARD, MOUTH OF THE NILE,
August 8th, 1798.

MY DEAR SIR—

Almighty God has made me the happy instrument in destroying the enemy's fleet; which, I hope, will be a blessing to Europe. . . . I hope there will be no difficulty in our getting refitted at Naples.

. . . Your most obliged and affectionate

HORATIO NELSON.

Dance, little reflections of blue water, dance, while there is yet time.

NAPLES

“Get out of the way, with your skewbald ass. Heu! Heu!” There is scant room for the quality to pass up and down the whole Strada di Toledo. Such a running to and fro! Such a clacking, and clapping, and fleering, and cheering. Holy Mother of God, the town has gone mad. Listen to the bells. They will crack the very doors of Heaven with their jangling. The sky seems the hot half-hollow of a clanging bell. I verily believe they will rock the steeples off

their foundations. Ding! *Dang!* Dong! Jingle-Jingle! Clank! Clink! Twitter! Tingle! Half Naples is hanging on the ropes, I vow it is louder than when they crown the Pope. The lapis lazuli pillars in Jesus Church positively lurch with the noise; the carvings of Santa Chiara are at swinging poise. In San Dominico Maggiore, the altar quivers; Santa Maria del Carmine's chimes run like rivers tinkling over stones; the big bell of the Cathedral hammers and drones. It is gay today, with all the bells of Naples at play.

That's a fine equipage; those bays shine like satin. Why, it is the British Ambassadors, and two British officers with her in the carriage! Where is her hat? Tut, you fool, she doesn't need one, she is wearing a ribbon like a Roman senator. Blue it is, and there are gold letters: "Nelson and Victory." The woman is undoubtedly mad, but it is a madness which kindles. "*Viva Nelson! Viva Miladi!*" A half a hundred hats are flying in the air like kites, and all the white handkerchiefs in Naples wave from the balconies.

Brava, Emma Hamilton, a fig for the laws of good taste, your heart beats blood, not water. Let pale-livered ladies wave decorously; do you drive the streets and tell the *lazzaroni* the good news. Proud Lady Hamilton! Mad, whole-hearted Lady Hamilton. *Viva! Viva ancora!* Wear your Nelson-anchor earrings for the sun to flash in; cut a dash in your new blue shawl, spotted with these same anchors. What if lily-tongued dandies dip their pens in gall to jeer at you, your blood is alive. The red of it stains a bright band across the pages of history. The others are ghosts, rotting in aged tombs. Light your three thousand lamps, that your windows spark and twinkle "Nelson" for all the world to see, and even the little wavelets of the bay have a largess of gold petals dropped from his name. Rule, Britannia, though she doesn't deserve it; it is all Nelson and the Ambassadors, in the streets of Naples.

He has rooms at the Palazzo Sesso, the British Admiral, and all day long he watches the red, half-closed eye of Vesuvius gazing down at his riding ships. At night, there is a red plume over the mountain, and the light of it fills the room with a crimson glow, it might be a gala lit for him. His eyes swim. In the open sky hangs a steel-white star, and a bar of silver cuts through the red reflections of the mirrors. Red and silver, for the bay is not blue at night.

“ Oh brave Nelson, oh God bless and protect our brave deliverer, oh, Nelson, Nelson, what do we not owe to you.” Sea-blue, the warp; but the thread of the woof is bolted red. Fiddlers and dinners—well, or Hell! as the case may be. Queens, populace—these are things, like guns, to face. Ros-tral columns and birthday fêtes jar the nerves of a wounded head; it is better in bed, in the rosy gloom of a plume-lit room.

So the Admiral rests in the Palazzo Sesso, the guest of his Ambassador, and his ships ride at anchor under the flaming mountain.

The shuttle shoots, the shuttle weaves. The red thread to the blue thread cleaves. The web is plaiting which nothing unreaves.

The Admiral buys the Ambassadors a table, a pleasant tribute to hospitality. It is of satin-wood, sprinkled over with little flying loves arrayed in pink and blue sashes. They sit at this table for hours, he and she, discussing the destiny of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and her voice is like water tinkling over stones, and her face is like the same water twinkling in shallows.

She counts his money for him, and laughs at his inability to reduce *carolins* to English sixpences. She drives him out to Caserta to see the Queen, and parades him on the Chiaia to delight the common people. She is always before him, a mist of rose and silver, a damask irradiation, shading and lighting like a palpitant gem.

In the evenings, by the light of two wax candles, the Admiral writes kind acknowledgments to the tributes of half a world. Moslem and Christian sweetly united to stamp out liberty. It is an inspiring sight to see. Rule Britannia indeed, with Slavs and Turks boosting up her footstool. The Sultan has sent a Special Envoy bearing gifts: the Chelenck —“ Plume of Triumph,” all in diamonds, and a pelisse of sables, just as bonds of his eternal gratitude. “ *Viva il Turco!* ” says Lady Hamilton. The Mother of His Sultanic Majesty begs that the Admiral’s pocket may be the repository of a diamond-studded box to hold his snuff. The Russian Tzar, a bit self-centred as most monarchs are, sends him his portrait, diamond-framed of course. The King of Sardinia glosses over his fewer gems by the richness of his com-

pliments. The East India Company, secure of its trade, has paid him ten thousand pounds. The Turkish Company has given him plate. A grateful country augments his state by creating him the smallest kind of peer, with a couple of tuppences a year, and veneering it over by a grant of arms. Arms for an arm, but what for an eye! Does the Admiral smile as he writes his reply? Writes with his left hand that he is aware of the high honor it will be to bear this shield: "A chief undulated argent, from which a palm-tree issuant, between a disabled ship on the dexter, and a ruinous battery on the sinister, all proper." "Very proper, indeed," nods Sir William, but Lady Hamilton prods the coloured paper shield a trifle scornfully. "If I was King of England, I would make you Duke Nelson, Marquis Nile, Earl Aboukir, Viscount Pyramid, Baron Crocodile and Prince Victory." "My dear Emma, what a child you are," says Sir William; but the Admiral looks out of the window at the blood-red mountain and says nothing at all.

Something shakes Naples. Shakes so violently that it makes the candles on the Admiral's writing-table flicker. Earthquakes, perhaps. Aye, earthquakes, but not from the red, plumed mountain. The dreadful tread of marching men is rocking the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and the *fanfare* of Republican trumpets blows over the city like a great wind. It swirls the dust of Monarchy in front of it, across Naples and out over the Chiaia to the sea.

The Admiral walks his quarterdeck with the blue bay beneath him, but his eyes are red with the glare of Vesuvius, and the blood beats in and out of his heart so rapidly that he is almost stifled. All Naples is red to the Admiral, but the core of crimson is the Palazzo Sesso, in whose windows, at night, the silver stars flash so brightly. "Crimson and silver," thinks the Admiral, "O Emma, Emma Hamilton!"

It is December now, and Naples is heaving and shuddering with the force of the Earth shock. There is no firm ground on which to stand. Beneath the Queen's footsteps is a rocking jelly. Even the water of the bay boils and churns and knocks loudly against the wooden sides of the British ships.

Over the satin-wood table, the Admiral and the Amba-

sadress sit in consultation, and red fire flares between them across its polished surface. "My adorable, unfortunate Queen! Dear, dear Queen!" Lady Hamilton's eyes are carbuncles burning into the Admiral's soul. He is dazzled, confused, used to the glare on blue water he thinks he sees it now. It is Duty and Kings. Caste versus riff-raff. The roast beef of old England against fried frogs' legs.

Red, blood-red, figures the weaving pattern, red blushing over blue, flushing the fabric purple, like lees of wine.

A blustering night to go to a party. But the coach is ready, and Lord Nelson is arrived from his ship. Official persons cannot give the slip to other official persons, and it is Kelim Effendi who gives the reception, the Sultan's Special Envoy. "Wait," to the coachman; then lights, jewels, sword-clickings, compliments, a promenade round the rooms, bowing, and a quick, unwatched exit from a side door. Someone will wake the snoring coachman hours hence and send him away. But it will not be his Master or Mistress. These hurry through dark, windy streets to the Molesiglio. How the waves flow by in the darkness! "A heavy groundswell," says the Admiral, but there is a lull in the wind. A password in English—we are all very English to-night. "Can you find your way, Emma?" Sir William is perturbed. But the Ambassadors is gone, gone lightly, swiftly, up the dark mole, and disappeared through a postern in the wall. She is aflame, scorching with red and gold fires, a torch of scarlet and ochre, a meteor of sulphur and chrome dashed with vermillion.

There are massacres in the streets of Naples; in the Palace, a cowering Queen. This is melodrama, and Emma is the Princess of Opera Bouffe. Opera Bouffe with Death as Pulchinello. Ho! Ho! You laugh. A merry fellow, and how if Death had you by the gizzard? Comedy and Tragedy shift masks, but Emma is intent on her task and sees neither. Frightened, vacillating monarchs to guide down a twisting stair; but there is Nelson climbing up. And there are lanterns, cutlasses, pistols, and, at last, the night air, black slapping water, and boats.

They are afloat, off the trembling, quivering soil of Naples, and their way is lit by a blood-red glimmer from the tossing fires of Vesuvius.

PALERMO, ET AL

Storm-tossed water, and an island set in a sea as blue as the bottom flowers of a spike of larkspur, come upon out of a hurly-burly of wind, and rain, and jagged waves. Through it all has walked the Ambassadress like some starry saint, pouring mercy out of full hands. The Admiral sees her misted with rose and purple, radiating comfort in a phosphoric glow. Is it wise to light one's life with an iridescence? Perhaps not, but the bolt is shot.

The stuff is weaving. Now one thread is uppermost, now another, making striae of reds and blues, or clouding colour over colour.

There are lemon groves, and cool stars, and love flooding beneath them. There are slanting decks, and full sails, and telescopes, wearying to a one-eyed man. Then a span of sunlight under pink oleanders; and evenings beneath painted ceilings, surrounded by the hum of a court.

Naples again, with cannon blazing. A haze of orders, documents, pardons, and a hanging. Palermo, and Dukedom and "*Nostro Liberatore*." One cannot see everything with one eye. Flight is possible, but misted vision shows strange shapes. It is Opera Bouffe, with Tragedy in the front row. Downing Street hints reproof, mentions stories of gaming-tables and high piles of gold. What nonsense to talk of a duel! Sir William and the Admiral live like brothers. But they will not be silent, those others. "Poor Lady Nelson, what will she do?" Still it is true that the lady in question is a bit of a shrew.

Blood beats back and forth under the lemon groves, proving itself a right of way. "I worship, nay, adore you, and if you was single, and I found you under a hedge, I would instantly marry you. Santa Emma! As truly as I believe in God, do I believe you are a saint." If the lady is a saint and he her acolyte, it is by a Divine right. These are the ways of Heaven; the Admiral prays and knows himself forgiven and absolved.

Revolve slowly, shuttle of the blue thread, red is a strong colour under Sicilian skies.

LEGHORN TO LONDON

A Court, an Ambassador, and a great Admiral, in travelling carriages rolling over the map of Europe. Straining

up hills, bowling along levels, rolling down slopes, and all to the tune of "Hip! Hip! Hurrah!" From Leghorn to Florence, to Ancona, to Trieste, is one long *Festa*. Every steeple sways with clashing bells, and people line the roads, yelling "*Viva Nelson! Hola! Hola! Viva Inghilterra!*" Wherever they go, it is a triumphal progress and a pinny-pinny-poppy-show. Whips crack, sparks fly, sails fill—another section of the map is left behind. Carriages again, up hill and down, from the seaboard straight into Austria.

Hip! Hip! Hip! The wheels roll into Vienna. Then what a to-do! Concerts, operas, fireworks too. Dinners where one hundred six-foot grenadiers do the waiting at table. Such grandiloquence! Such splendid, regal magnificence! Trumpets and cannons, and Nelson's health; the Jew wealth of Baron Arnstein, and the excellent wine of his cellars. Hayden conducts an oratorio while the guests are playing faro. Delightful city! What a pity one must leave! These are rewards worthy of the Battle of the Nile. You smile. Tut! Tut! Remember they are only foreigners; the true British breed writes home scurvy letters for all London to read. Hip! Hip! God save the King!

For two months, the travelling carriages stand in the stables; but horses are put to them at last, and they are off again. No Court this time; but what is a fleeing Queen to a victorious Admiral! Up hill, down dale, round and round roll the sparkling wheels, kicking up all the big and little stones of Austria. "Huzza for the Victor of Aboukir!" shouts the populace. The traces tighten, and the carriages are gone. In and out of Prague roll the wheels, and across the border into Germany.

Dresden at last, but an Electress turning her back on Lady Hamilton. A stuffy state, with a fussy etiquette! Why distress oneself for such a rebuff? Emma will get even with them yet. It is enough for her to do her "Attitudes," and to perfection. And still—and still—but Lady Hamilton has an iron will.

Proud Lady Hamilton! Blood-betrayed, hot-hearted Lady Hamilton! The wheels roll out of Dresden, and Lady Hamilton looks at the Admiral. "Oh, Nelson, Nelson." But the whips are cracking and one cannot hear.

Roll over Germany, wheels. Roll through Magdeburg, Lodwostz, Anhalt. Roll up to the banks of the Elbe, and

deposit your travellers in a boat once more. Along the green shores of the green-and-brown river to Hamburg, where merchants and bankers are waiting to honour the man who has saved their gold. Huzza for Nelson, Saviour of Banks! Where is the frigate a thankful country might have sent him? Not there. Why did he come overland, forsooth? The Lion and the Unicorn are uncouth beasts, but we do not mind in the least. No, indeed! We take a packet and land at Yarmouth.

“Hip! Hip! Hip! God save the King! Long live Nelson, Britain’s Pride!” The common people are beside themselves with joy, there is no alloy to their welcome. Before *The Wrestler’s* inn, troops are paraded. And every road is arcaded with flags and flowers. “He is ours! Hip! Hip! Nelson!” Cavalcades of volunteer cavalry march before him. Two days to London, and every road bordered with smiling faces. They cannot go faster than a footpace because the carriage is drawn by men. Muskets pop, and every shop in every town is a flutter of bunting.

Red, Lady Hamilton, red welcome for your Admiral. Red over foggy London. Bow bells peeling, and the crowded streets reeling through fast tears. Years, Emma, and Naples covered by their ashes.

Blood-red, his heart flashes to hers, but the great city of London is blurred to both of them.

MERTON

Early Autumn, and a light breeze rustling through the trees of Paradise Merton, and pashing the ripples of the Little Nile against the sides of the arched stone bridge. It is ten o’clock, and through the blowing leaves, the lighted windows of the house twinkle like red, pulsing stars. Far down the road is a jingle of harness, and a crunching of wheels. Out of the darkness flare the lamps of a postchaise, blazing basilisk eyes, making the smooth sides of leaves shine as they approach, the darkness swallowing in behind them. A rattle, a stamping of hoofs, and the chaise comes to a stand opposite a wooden gate. It is not late, maybe a bit ahead of time. The postboy eases himself in the saddle, and loosens his reins. The light from the red windows glitters in the varnished panels of the chaise.

How tear himself away from so dear a home! Can he

wrench himself apart, can he pull his heart out of his body? Her face is pitiful with tears. Two years gone, and only a fortnight returned. His head hums with the rushing of his blood. "Wife in the sight of Heaven"—surely one life between them now, and yet the summons has come. Blue water is calling, the peaked seas beckon.

The Admiral kneels beside his child's bed, and prays. These are the ways of the Almighty. "His will be done." Pathetic trust, thrusting aside desire. The fire on the hearth is faint and glowing, and throws long shadows across the room. How quiet it is, how far from battles and crowning seas.

She strains him in her arms, she whispers, sobbing, "Dearest husband of my heart, you are all the world to Emma." She delays his going by minute and minute. "My Dearest and most Beloved, God protect you and my dear Horatia and grant us a happy meeting. Amen! Amen!"

Tear, blue shuttle, through the impeding red, but have a care lest the thread snap in following.

"God bless you, George. Take care of Lady Hamilton." He shakes his brother-in-law by the hand. The chaise door bangs. The postboy flicks his whip, the horses start forward. Red windows through flecking trees. Blood-red windows growing dimmer behind him, until they are only a shimmer in the distance. His eyes smart, searching for their faint glimmer through blowing trees. His eyes smart with tears, and fears which seem to haunt him. All night he drives, through Guildford, over Hindhead, on his way to Portsmouth.

AT SEA, OFF CAPE TRAFALGAR

Blue as the tip of a deep blue salvia blossom, the inverted cup of the sky arches over the sea. Up to meet it, in a concave curve of bright colour, rises the water, flat, unrippled, for the wind scarcely stirs. How comes the sky so full of clouds on the horizon, with none over head? Clouds! Great clouds of canvas! Mighty ballooning clouds, bearing thunder and crinkled lightning in their folds. They roll up out of the horizon, tiered, stately. Sixty-four great thunderclouds, more perhaps, throwing their shadows over ten miles of sea.

Boats dash back and forth. Their ordered oars spark-

ling like silver as they lift and fall. Frigate captains receiving instructions, coming aboard the flagship, departing from it. Blue and white, with a silver flashing of boats.

Thirty-three clouds headed South, twenty-three others converging upon them! They move over the water as silently as the drifting air. Lines to lines, drawing nearer on the faint impulse of the breeze.

Blue coated, flashing with stars, the Admiral walks up and down the poop. Stars on his breast, in his eyes the white glare of the sea. The enemy wears, looping end to end, and waits, poised in a half-circle, like a pale new moon upon the water. The British ships point straight to the hollow between the horns, and even their stunsails are set. Arrows flung at a crescent over smooth blue water.

"Now, Blackwood, I am going to amuse the fleet with a signal. Mr. Pasco, I wish to say to the fleet, 'England confides that every man will do his duty.' You must be quick, for I have one more to make, which is for close action."

"If your Lordship will permit me to substitute 'expects' for 'confides,' it will take less time, because 'expects' is in the vocabulary and 'confides' must be spelt."

Flutter flags, fling out your message to the advancing arrows. Ripple and fly above the Admiral's head. Signal flags are of all colours, but the Admiral sees only the red. It beats above him, outlined against the salvia-blue sky. A crimson blossom sprung from his heart, the banner royal of his Destiny struck out sharply against the blue of Heaven.

Frigate Captain Blackwood bids good-bye to the Admiral. "I trust, my Lord, that on my return to the *Victory*, I shall find your Lordship well and in possession of twenty prizes." A gash of blood-colour cuts across the blue sky, or is it that the Admiral's eyes are tired with the flashing of the sea? "God bless you, Blackwood, I shall never speak to you again." What is it that haunts his mind? He is blinded by red, blood-red fading to rose, smeared purple, blotted out by blue. Larkspur sea and blue sky above it, with the flickering flags of his signal standing out in cameo.

Boom! A shot passes through the main topgallantsail of the *Victory*. The ship is under fire. Her guns cannot

bear while she is head on. Straight at the floating half-moon of ships goes the *Victory*, leading her line, muffled in the choking smoke of the *Bucentaure's* guns. The sun is dimmed, but through the smoke-cloud prick diamond sparkles from the Admiral's stars as he walks up and down the quarterdeck.

Red glare of guns in the Admiral's eyes. Red stripe of marines drawn up on the poop. Eight are carried off by a single shot, and the red stripe liquefies, and seeps, lapping, down the gangway. Every stu'n sail boom is shot away. The blue of the sea has vanished; there is only the red of cannon, and the white twinkling sparks of the Admiral's stars.

The bows of the *Victory* cross the wake of the *Bucentaure*, and one after another, as they bear, the double-shotted guns tear through the woodwork of the French ship. The *Victory* slips past like a shooting shuttle, and runs on board the *Redoutable*, seventy-four, and their spars lock, with a shock which almost stops their headway.

It is a glorious Autumn day outside the puff-ball of smoke. A still, blue sea, unruffled, banded to silver by a clear sun.

Guns of the *Victory*, guns of the *Redoutable*, exploding incessantly, making one long draw of sound. Rattling upon it, rain on a tin roof, the pop-pop of muskets from the mizzen top of the *Redoutable*. There are sharpshooters in the mizzen top, aiming at the fog below. Suddenly, through it, spears the gleam of diamonds; it is the Admiral's stars, reflecting the flashes of the guns.

Red blood in a flood before his eyes. Red from horizon to zenith, crushing down like beaten metal. The Admiral falls to his knees, to his side, and lies there, and the crimson glare closes over him, a cupped inexorable end. "They have done for me at last, Hardy. My back-bone is shot through."

The blue thread is snapped and the bolt falls from the loom. Weave, shuttle of the red thread. Weave over and under yourself in a scarlet ecstasy. It is all red now he comes to die. Red, with the white sparkles of those cursed stars.

Carry him down gently, and let no man know that it is the Admiral who has fallen. He covers his face and his stars with his handkerchief. The white glitter is quenched; the white glitter of his life will shine no more. "Doctor, I am gone. I leave Lady Hamilton and my daughter Horatia as a legacy to my Country." Pathetic trust, thrusting aside knowledge. Flint, the men who sit in Parliament, flint which no knocking can spark to fire. But you still believe in men's goodness, knowing only your own heart. "Let my dear Lady Hamilton have my hair, and all other things belonging to me."

The red darkens, and is filled with tossing fires. He sees Vesuvius, and over it the single silver brilliance of a star.

"One would like to live a little longer, but thank God, I have done my duty."

Slower, slower passes the red thread and stops. The weaving is done.

In the log-book of the *Victory*, it is written: "Partial firing continued until 4.30, when a victory having been reported to the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Nelson, K.B., he died of his wound."

CALAIS

It is a timber-yard, pungent with the smell of wood: Oak, pine, and cedar. But under the piles of white boards, they say there are bones rotting. An old guide to Calais speaks of a wooden marker shaped like a battledoor, handle downwards, on the broad part of which was scratched: "Emma Hamilton, England's Friend." It was a poor thing and now even that has gone. Let us buy an oak chip for remembrance. It will only cost a sou.

AMY LOWELL.